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11 February 1964

The Honorable Robert S. McNamara  
The Secretary of Defense  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In response to your telephone calls of last night, I set forth below my purely personal reasons why I am firmly opposed to the surfacing of our special aircraft at this time. As I pointed out in my letter to the President this morning, I believe that each of the participants in the discussion of 29 November 1963 held at the White House should have the opportunity to express himself on the complex issues involved. As I indicated to you last night, this matter is of such intensely compelling importance to Mr. McCone that I do not feel free to have my views interpreted as representing his views or the official views of the Director of Central Intelligence, especially since he will return this evening and I am not aware of any emergency situation requiring precipitous action.

This special aircraft system is our most important uncommitted intelligence collection asset and the longer the United States can deny to the Soviet Union information on this very remarkable reconnaissance capability, the greater will be the net advantage to our national security. It also represents our only foreseeable capability for prompt reconnaissance of crisis situations and we must therefore do everything possible to preserve our ability to use it operationally.

While there is no doubt that the vehicle will eventually come to public notice, an official disclosure by the President or by a senior official of the Administration would clearly present the Soviets with a major confrontation, the policy considerations of

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which have not yet been weighed. We have not seen fit to make such a disclosure of our satellite reconnaissance program and present policy indicates that we do not intend to at this time. It goes without saying that an official disclosure would invite legitimate questions as to its intended use -- questions which we are not now prepared to answer. I therefore feel that we should not take any steps which might limit our ability to use the vehicle for non-attributable reconnaissance.

Faithfully yours,

/s/

Marshall S. Carter  
Lieutenant General, USA  
Acting Director

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